

Detailed Overview

Why contract with Virginia Tech Child Welfare Advocacy Services?

The Virginia Tech Child Welfare Advocacy Services (VTCWAS) team has done outstanding work in advocating for children in foster care by developing an effective model. VTCWAS has established protocol for the screening of cases for Supplementary Security Income (SSI), submitting applications, monitoring case status, and handling follow-up issues. This model has been refined over time and has become highly effective from the standpoint of cases approved by the Social Security Administration (SSA). VTCWAS's expertise encompasses SSI application process, disabilities, foster care program, and local social service agencies.

Primary Goals:

1. Provide expertise in the review of child welfare cases for indicators of disability
2. File applications on behalf of children with disabilities and follow-up during the application process with SSA and the LDSS through the appeal process, as necessary and appropriate
3. Provide technical assistance and support to LDSS social workers throughout the SSI application process

Programmatic Benefits

Children in foster care who have serious disabilities can benefit from conversion of their funding to Supplementary Security Income (SSI). Below is a discussion of these by major goals, including the approximate number of CSA-funded* children who have disabilities and are not receiving SSI. The IV-E children who should be considered for SSI are also noted.

Return to Own Home: Reunification is more likely (with benefits) in a low-income family. Currently, about 95 children are CSA-funded. Some IV-E children could benefit if converted to SSI so these resources would be available to the child once reunited with the family.

Relative Placement: Placement with a relative is more feasible if the child has funds to cover costs of living. While this is a "high" goal, some relatives may not be able to accept the child and custody without the funds. SSI could make such a placement feasible for more. Currently, about 15 children are CSA-funded. If IV-E children are converted to SSI, the child would retain this assistance regardless of the relative's income and their holding custody.

Independent Living (IL) and Permanent Foster Care (PFC): SSI can help the older child live independently (emancipation) and provide ongoing financial support for the young adult. While in Foster Care and afterwards, a youth receiving SSI will be entitled to transitional and specialized employment services, as well as work incentives. They will be set up to have funds and to get services, with more options and undoubtedly better outcomes. Currently, about 217 in IL and 163 in PFC are CSA-funded. Special consideration needs to be given to youth with disabilities who are receiving IV-E so that they transition appropriately to SSI, particularly those over age 16: about 73 are in IL and 44 in PFC. For those on SSI, a transition and re-evaluation takes place in shifting from SSI as a child and to SSI as an adult.

Adoption: SSI automatically qualifies a child for IV-E Adoption subsidy and Medicaid assistance payments making them a better candidate for adoption. These children will be entitled to get Medicaid across state lines, including the wide range of services. Currently, about 148 are CSA-funded. The actual SSI payment can continue, depending on the income of the families. Some local agencies establish agreements in which adoptive parents accept the SSI in lieu of a regular maintenance subsidy or with only a subsidy agreement of \$1 to allow a later adjustment in case the child loses SSI due to the family income.

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA): SSI should be examined for the children in this goal. They are placed here due to severe and chronic emotional, physical, or neurological disabling conditions requiring treatment and services in a residential setting. Currently, about 81 are CSA-funded.

* Comprehensive Services Act - The CSA was established as a result Virginia State law that created a collaborative system of services and funding to address the needs of at-risk youth and their families.